

## Market Square



### Background to Kuala Lumpur

This brief introduction provides the context for the Heritage Trails, which focus on pre-war buildings. Kuala Lumpur had its origins in the 1850s when the Malay Chief of Klang sent Chinese upriver to open new and larger tin mines. They landed at the confluence of Sungai Lumpur (now Gombak) and Sungai Klang and established mines at Ampang. Later, tin mines were opened at Pudu and Batu.

This trading post was a wild frontier town plagued by floods, fires, disease and the Selangor Civil War (1870–73). During this time, Kapitan Cina Yap Ah Loy emerged as a leader, responsible for the survival and growth of the town. In 1880, in view of its strategic location, the Selangor state capital was moved from Klang to Kuala Lumpur. Nothing of this earlier period remains as all structures were of wood and *atap* (thatch) which were destroyed in the fire and subsequent flood of 1881.




Thereafter, Frank Swettenham, the British Resident of Selangor who was instrumental in the development of the town, required that buildings be constructed of brick and tile. The advent of the railway increased accessibility. The development of buildings intensified in the 1890s so that it warranted the establishment of the Sanitary Board. In 1896, Kuala Lumpur was chosen as the capital of the newly formed Federated Malay States.

The multiracial community of this period settled in various sections of town. Market Square, east of Sungai Klang, became the commercial centre for the whole town. The Chinese congregated around this Square and south into Chinatown. To the north, across Java Street (now Jalan Tun Perak), were the Malays. Nearby, a number of Indian *Chettiars* (money-lenders), and in later years Indian Muslim traders, set up business. West of the river, the Padang (now Merdeka Square) was the focal point of the British administration.

Kuala Lumpur continued to grow despite two World Wars, the rubber and tin commodity crash and the State of Emergency (1948–60) during which Malaya was preoccupied with the communist insurgency. In 1957, the Federation of Malaya gained its independence from British rule. Kuala Lumpur remained the capital through the formation of Malaysia, achieving city status in 1972, and was established as the Federal Territory in 1974.



**Key**

-  buildings of interest
-  sungai (river)
-  light rail transit station



## Shophouse Architecture

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This is a tour through one of the early commercial centres of Kuala Lumpur, which includes examples of various styles of shophouse architecture. These styles were initially adapted from buildings in southern China and later incorporated Western elements.

The typical Chinese shophouses were built in rows with a common wall between them. Each shophouse was long and quite narrow, with a depth of two or three times the width. The traditional shophouse had two storeys. It combined a store in the front at street level with the owner's living quarters above or at the rear. A central air well provided light and ventilation. The first floor projected over the ground floor to form a covered walkway. The building backed onto a narrow lane, which was used for deliveries and removal of night soil, and to provide access for fire fighting.

Prior to 1884, shophouses were *atap* huts built by Chinese merchants to service the miners. In 1884, Frank Swettenham, concerned about fire hazards, decreed that the shophouses had to be rebuilt in brick with tiled roofs.

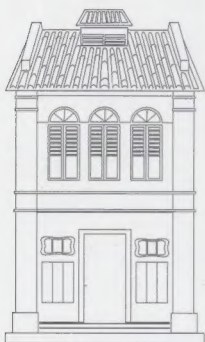


### Five-foot Way

A shophouse was required to "provide an arcade or verandah-way at least five feet in width ...". Called the *kaki lima* or five-foot way, this created a 1.5m wide covered passage, which enabled pedestrians to walk under cover, protected from the sun

and rain, and away from vehicular traffic. As the town grew, sewers and other utilities were laid beneath the streets and the roads were re-paved, thus raising the street level above that of the five-foot way. The level of the walkway can therefore be an indication of the period in which a shophouse was built – the older the shophouse, the lower the walkway.

In general, the period of construction can be approximated by its architectural style, namely Utilitarian, Neo-classical or Art Deco.



### **Utilitarian 1880s – 1900s**

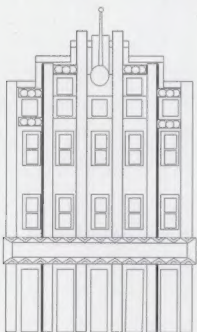
Large single wooden beams spanned the façade and were supported by heavy pillars. The first floor had a single opening, which was covered with simple wooden shutters. Later, this was replaced by a brick and mortar wall with two or three windows. The windows then became more detailed

and included fanlights. The elevation of these shops was quite low with steeply sloping tiled roofs that often included jack roofs for additional ventilation.



### **Neo-classical 1900s – 1930s**

These shophouses were often three-storey high. The façades were more elaborate, incorporating elements of Neo-gothic, Baroque, Palladian or Renaissance designs. Greek and Roman columns, ornately decorated window frames and festoons were common. Ornate façades featured parapets, open balustrades and flamboyant gables.



### **Art Deco 1930s – 1940s**

Art Deco façades were characterized by strong horizontal and vertical elements and decorations were reduced to abstract geometric shapes. Typical Art Deco features included banding devices, Shanghai-plaster motifs and concrete flag poles.





## 1 Central Market

### *Pasar Seni*

This Art Deco building by architect/engineer TY Lee began construction in 1936. Its layout is splayed to align with the street pattern. No two façades are alike but the whole is held together by the unifying treatment of the windows and doors. The stepped entrance design as well as the strong moulded frieze, which runs along just below the roofline, is repeated on the sides. Note the Art Deco ornamentation in the form of the wrought iron panels of interlocking rings, above the doorways. The windows and skylight are "Calorex" glass, which transmits only 20% of the sun's heat but admits 60% daylight. For years, the Market was Kuala Lumpur's largest single room, measuring 123.7m long, 60.8m wide and 7.9m high (407ft x 200ft x 26ft).

Central Market was the town's wholesale and retail wet market. When the decision was made to demolish the Market and surrounding shophouses, concerned citizens and organizations, including Badan Warisan Malaysia, campaigned for its conservation. With government backing, Bumi Harta Sdn Bhd, the property developer, commissioned architects William Lim Associates and Chen Voon Fee to renovate the building. When it reopened in 1986, this was the first case of a heritage building being adapted for a change in its use on a large scale.

The Central Market is a cultural centre, filled with restaurants and handicraft shops.

## 2 Jalan Hang Kasturi

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When Central Market was a market selling fresh produce, the Jalan Hang Kasturi shops played a complementary role, retailing such goods as dried fish and preserved vegetables. Many of the dry goods stores still remain.

The shophouses along this pedestrian mall are mostly Neo-classical structures. A particularly fine example is the block of shophouses at No 32–52, built around 1909. Alternating roofline and window shapes link these two-storey buildings.

## 3 OCBC Building

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### *Bangunan OCBC*

This Art Deco building was constructed in 1938 as the headquarters of the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation. The architect was AO Coltman. This design was innovative for its time as it provided basement storage for bicycles, which were usually parked haphazardly on the pavement.

Unlike other Art Deco façades, the corner of the building is not accentuated due to the recessed entrance and the regularly spaced windows that flow across the façade. At one end is a tapering stepped pylon with a flagpole on top. A muted mosaic panel runs up the centre of the pylon.



## 4 Market Square

### *Medan Pasar*

The original township centred around Yap Ah Loy's large market and gambling sheds, close to the river confluence where the miners first landed. His house, a large wooden structure, was located at the Lebuhr Pasar Besar end of the Square. In 1882, citing health reasons and claiming that the site was state land, Frank Swettenham wanted Yap Ah Loy's market and gambling sheds demolished. As a compromise, Yap Ah Loy removed his gambling sheds and was allowed to rebuild his market provided it had brick piers and a galvanized iron roof. However, he was only granted the land title for life and, upon his death in 1885, the Government took over and relocated the market. The site vacated by the original market became known as Old Market Square.



In 1907, AB Hubback, Government Architect, presented to the Sanitary Board design guidelines for shophouses to be erected in the Square. This has resulted in a gracious symmetry for the Square as a whole. The three-storey shophouses are examples of ornate Neo-classical designs, as evidenced by the decorative plaster garlands, roof-top gables and balustrades.

Later, two classic Art Deco structures, the Mayban Finance Berhad building and the Clock Tower, were built. The Tower was erected in 1937 to commemorate the coronation of King George VI. The sunburst motif, a common Art Deco design, is featured at the base.



## 5 Sin Seng Nam Restaurant

*Restoran Sin Seng Nam*



Loke Yew built this block of shophouses located at No 2–8 Medan Pasar around 1906. Designed by AK Moosdeen, the block was sometimes referred to as The Red House owing to the distinctive exposed red brick, which has since been painted over. Although designed as a whole, each shophouse façade is treated differently with the alternating window designs

between each floor and shophouse. In 1908, the block was extended to include No 8.

On the Lebuah Pasar Besar side, the corner shophouse, Sin Seng Nam Restaurant, has very fine stepped Dutch gables. Note the interesting entryways where wooden bars serve as security doors and also provide ventilation. In earlier times, the restaurant was well patronized by planters and known as the Vatican.

## 6 The Old Gian Singh Building

*Bangunan Lama Gian Singh*



This corner block of buildings, along Lebuah Ampang and Jalan Tun Perak, was constructed in 1909. Built by different owners in a diversity of styles, they share a common roofline and complement one another beautifully. Look carefully at the complex plasterwork and detailing, a blend of Dutch, English and Islamic influences.

Tan Jit Cheuh built the shophouses facing Lebuah Ampang. Two bay windows



adorn the corner of the building and a pair of oculi windows can be seen above the entrance. On Jalan Tun Perak, the central shophouses, built by Loke Yew, have recessed upper floors. Observe the curious shortened columns on the first floor above the rusticated bases.

Rasoolbhoy Allibhoy built the two shophouses on the right. The star and crescent motif on the central triangular pediment indicates an Islamic influence. Gian Singh, a major textile store occupied this shophouse from the 1920s onwards. In 1921, the rightmost section of the building was added to the block.



## 7 Bank Bumiputra Building

### *Bangunan Bank Bumiputra*

Located at the corner of Jalan Tun Perak and Jalan Melaka, this beautiful Art Deco building was designed by AO Coltman in the 1930s. Rusticated arches of the ground floor arcade follow the original curve of the road. The front façade has a central panel flanked by two tower-like pylons. Framing the panel is an exceptional white stucco frieze of interlocking disks. Alternating vertical bands of rendered wall with elegant motifs divide the panel.

Originally called the Oriental Building, it housed Radio Malaya when first built.



The building is an example of the links between the innovations of broadcasting and the style of Art Deco. From afar, the building resembles the early radio designs of that period.

## 8 Lebu Ampang



This is a vibrant area, with predominantly Indian restaurants, spice and sundry stores and money-lenders. There are also street vendors selling fresh flower garlands. This is a street where examples of Utilitarian, Neo-classical and Art Deco features can be seen.

Shophouses No 16-18, built in 1930, has as Art Deco ornamentation stylized

plaster peacocks between the two upper floors. No 24-30 is a linked group of Neo-classical shophouses elaborately decorated with distinctive plaster carvings, scrolls and rooftop balustrade. Columns on the top floors divide each façade into two bays, with a window in each bay. No 32-34 are two-storey Utilitarian shophouses. The jack roof, carved wooden fanlights and the unusual butterfly grills provide ventilation. The roof is clad over but the original old tiles are still evident.

Lebu Ampang was the street of the *Chettians*, a south Indian caste of money-lenders. An economic force in Kuala Lumpur's early development, the *Chettians'* assessment of the credit worthiness of their clients was to prove invaluable. Their role has diminished with the establishment of banks and other financial institutions.

An example of a *Chettiar* house exists at No 85, which is decorated with glazed ceramic tiles of peacock designs. The peacock is the carriage of



Lord Muruga who, in his bachelor manifestation, is the Hindu deity of the *Chettiar* caste. Inside the shophouse, the traditional low benches, chests and an old safe, are visible expressions of this activity.



## 9 Jalan Tun HS Lee

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High Street, as it was first known, was one of the early streets in which the shophouses were rebuilt in brick and tiles as can be seen in No 34-40.

These are some of the oldest two-storey traditional shophouses dating back to the mid-1880s. The walls are constructed in brick and plastered over. The original roofs have been clad over by corrugated iron or tile roofs. These shophouses are lower than the adjacent buildings and the five-foot ways here are around 2ft (60cm) below the surface of the road.

Note the strong Chinese influence in this street with many façades adorned with small octagonal *feng shui* (geomancy) mirrors. *Feng shui* is an ancient Chinese belief system that teaches how to live in harmony with the positive and negative forces in the universe. The mirrors are placed there by the shopkeepers or owners to repel evil spirits. The spirits see themselves in the mirror and are frightened away.

## 10 The Old Federal Stores Building

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*Bangunan Lama Federal Stores*

Two brothers, Chua Cheng Tuan and Chua Cheng Bok, founded the Cycle and Carriage Company in 1899. They moved to this building known as Federal Stores, located on Lebuh Pasar Besar, in 1905. The building is quite unique due in part to the



fanciful façade with its garlic shaped finials and absence of the five-foot way. The building spans the entire block.

The company was responsible for importing many of the first cars into Malaya. In 1909, when they introduced a bus service, the rickshaw pullers and gharrie drivers protested against it by stoning the premises. The company had the agencies for the Monopole cycles and carriages, Albion car and Singer sewing machines. Today, Cycle and Carriage is a thriving car dealer in Malaysia and Singapore.

## 11 MS Ally Company

*Syarikat MS Ally Sdn Bhd*

This building, located at the corner of Lebuhr Pasar Besar and Jalan Tun HS Lee, was built by Yap Hon Chin in 1907. In 1910, it became known as the Federated Building as it housed the showrooms for the Federated Engineering Company. Later, Sime Darby established its Kuala Lumpur branch office here. The building is now occupied by MS Ally, which from its origins as a cigar shop to a pharmacy today, has served generations of Kuala Lumpur's residents.

The corner façade of the building is unusual in that the windows are asymmetrical. The Dutch-style gables create a distinctive skyline. The peacock feathers and wave curves on the triangular pediments should be noted.





## 12 Bank Simpanan Building

*Bangunan Bank Simpanan*

No 99 Jalan Tun HS Lee is a three-storey shophouse built in 1914 in classic Palladian style. It was designed to accommodate the printing presses and provide the best natural light for typesetting, hence the wide span of the façade and the new larger-style Renaissance windows. The pediment spanned the entire roofline of the three bays. The building was reputedly the largest shophouse constructed during World War 1.



Called the Commercial Press Building, it housed the Commercial Press and Photographic Stores. The company, established in 1908 sold wholesale photographic materials and provided printing services. The Press printed the first Chinese newspaper in Kuala Lumpur.

## 13 The Sze Ya Temple & Environs

*Kuil Sze Ya dan Persekitaran*



Following *feng shui* principles, Sze Ya Temple is set at an angle to Jalan Tun HS Lee and Lebuhr Pudu. As a result of this orientation, the Temple is tucked behind the shophouses and is visually obscured. The orientation also created the unusual angle of the walls, arches and stairways of these buildings.



A lane off Lebuah Pudu leads to the gate of the Sin Sze Si Sze Ya, or Sze Ya Temple. Built in 1864 by Kapitan Cina Yap Ah Loy as a tribute to the deities Sin Sze Ya and Si Sze Ya, it is one of the oldest and most revered Taoist temples.

During the turbulent 1880s when there was frequent fighting between the Malays and Chinese, Yap Ah Loy was sent to assist Sheng Meng Li,

Kapitan Cina of Sungai Ujong. When the latter died in 1862, it was popularly held that "the blood which flowed when his head was chopped off was white and not red ...". As a result, he was later credited with supernatural powers and associated with the powerful Cantonese god Sin Sze Ya. The oracles of this deity guided Yap Ah Loy during the Selangor Civil War. Later, when Yap Ah Loy's blood-brother and loyal lieutenant Chung Lai died, he too became deified and was known as Si Sze Ya.

Originally housed in a small *atap* hut, the Temple was rebuilt in 1882 in brick and tiles. It comprises a main hall and two side halls. In the main hall, the statues of Sin Sze Ya and Si Sze Ya are placed on the central altar. An altar to Yap Ah Loy with his photograph is on the left. Each time a worshipper makes a donation to the Temple, the brass bell and large drum along the left wall are sounded to announce the donor's name.

The hall to the right houses Kuan Yin, Goddess of Mercy, and several Buddha figurines. The left hall pays tribute to Thai Swe, Guardian of the Year, and Choi Sen, God of Wealth.

In 1904, when Yap Ah Loy's family wanted to reclaim the land, the High Court ruled against it. A Temple Trust was then established, comprising 12 trustees representing the different Chinese clans.





The Kuala Lumpur  
Heritage Trails is a  
collaboration between

Tourism Malaysia and Badan Warisan Malaysia (Heritage of Malaysia Trust). The Badan is a non-profit non-government organization. It was established in 1983 with the objective of promoting the preservation and conservation of Malaysia's built heritage.

The heritage centre of the Badan is located in a mock Tudor building dating from 1925. In the garden is a bamboo hut built by Orang Asli of the Temiar community and a restored Malay timber house known as the Rumah Penghulu. This was formerly the residence of a local headman in Kedah. It is beautifully decorated throughout with intricate carvings and has been furnished to reflect a house in the early thirties. A guided tour and viewing of a video documentary on the restoration is available.

The centre hosts regular exhibitions with a heritage theme and has a gift shop and reference library. Visitors are very welcome.

Badan Warisan Malaysia is located at No.2 Jalan Stonor, 50450 Kuala Lumpur.

Tel 603 244 9273  
Fax 603 245 7884  
*Open Monday to Friday,  
10am to 4pm*



**BADAN WARISAN** MALAYSIA

## Market Square



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URL <http://tourism.gov.my>

Malaysia Tourist  
Information Centre (MATIC)  
Tel: 603 264 3929  
Fax: 603 262 1149

TIC Plaza Putra  
Tel: 603 293 6664

TIC Kuala Lumpur Railway Station  
Tel: 603 274 6063

TIC Putra World Trade Centre  
Tel: 603 441 1295